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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6894
INFO RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ALMATY PRIORITY 9830
RUEHAAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT PRIORITY 1850
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK PRIORITY 4027
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 0922
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 1164
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 1934
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE PRIORITY
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 6789
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 5098
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0276
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 1071
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT PRIORITY 2585
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE PRIORITY 1002
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 4672
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 1358
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 9635
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 1810
RHWSMRC/USCINCCENT MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 ISLAMABAD 000650

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TAGS: AF MOPS PK PREL PTER

SUBJECT: INTERIOR MINISTER ANALYZES REPRISAL ATTACKS
AGAINST GOP; PREVIEWS OPERATIONS AGAINST MILITANT
COMMANDERS AND POSSIBLE NEW MEASURES AGAINST DOMESTIC
EXTREMISTS

REF: A. ISLAMABAD 620
1B. ISLAMABAD 625
1C. LAHORE 83
1D. LAHORE 61

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Peter W. Bodde,
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (S//NF) Summary: In a February 5 meeting with the Ambassador, Interior Minister Aftab Ahmed Khan Sherpao shared his assessment that, with one exception, the spate of suicide bombings, IED and missile attacks since mid-January were not/not motivated by sectarian tensions; these attacks were timed to coincide with Shi'a Ashura procession days simply to maximize publicity. Law enforcement officials believe that the suicide bombers in Islamabad, Peshawar and Dera Ismail Khan were outfitted by the same bomb-maker. The Government of Pakistan (GOP) has evidence that Baitullah Mehsud -- the commander who issued a public threat against the government following the January 16 Pakistan military strike on a militant compound at Zamzola -- is responsible for those suicide attacks and for the missile attacks at Tank and Bannu. Pakistani security forces are planning intensified operations against Baitullah Mehsud and fellow commander Sadiq Noor. Sherpao also acknowledged a nexus between Taliban-style extremists operating in the PAK-AFG border region and extremist organizations such as banned extremist organization Jaish-e-Mohammad. The Minister hoped that an interagency meeting to approve next steps against domestic extremist organizations and UNSCR 1267 Committee-sanctioned entities will be held later this month. End summary.

Who's Behind the Bombings?

¶ 2. (S) Minister Sherpao reviewed with the Ambassador the government's assessment of a series of suicide, IED and missile attacks since mid-January (ref A). Sherpao noted the similarity between several of the attacks, including the January 26 suicide attack on the Islamabad Marriott (2 killed) and the January 27 suicide attack in Peshawar (13 killed), saying that the bombings shared a common methodology: "suicide belts" packing 1.5 kg of Russian-made explosives, plus grenades, pellets and nails.

¶ 3. (S//NF) The Minister said that the GOP is certain that Baitullah Mehsud is behind many, but not all, of these attacks. Following Baitullah's threats after the Zamzola raid, Pakistani intelligence services intercepted a telephone conversation in which Baitullah said "I have reached the heart, but I am not yet cooled off." (Note: Sherpao interpreted Mehsud's phrasing "the heart" as referring to the suicide attack at the Islamabad Marriott. End note.) Six militants arrested by Pakistani forces in Dera Ismail Khan were Baitullah's men, Sherpao said. Officials are still debating whether Baitullah or Fakir Mohammad's Tehrik-e Nifaz-e Shariat-e Mohammadi (TNSM) is responsible for the January 27 Peshawar bombing. Sherpao attributed a missile fired at Bannu to local Taliban. In contrast, a missile attack in Mir Ali on January 22 appears to have been the work of Sadiq Noor, but the attack was made to look as if Baitullah's group was responsible. The Minister said that investigators have not discovered any links between these recent attacks and the Haqqani network. Sherpao was certain that, with the exception of clearly sectarian incidents in

ISLAMABAD 00000650 002 OF 003

Hangu (the scene of similar violence during Moharram in 2006), the current wave of attacks in Islamabad, NWFP, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Frontier Regions are secular and retaliatory in nature. The bombers deployed around the 9th and 10th day of the Muslim month of Moharram, Sherpao said, in order to amplify the effects of the attacks.

¶ 4. (S//NF) The Minister said that he initially believed that the suicide attack on the Islamabad Marriott was the work of extremists supporting the Kashmiri militancy, as the Indian High Commission had scheduled its Republic Day reception at the hotel later that day. He changed his mind after hearing the intercepted telephone conversation in which Baitullah claimed to have "reached the heart" with one of his attacks.

Security Operations Being Planned

¶ 5. (S) Sherpao said that political agents and the Army are preparing plans to move against both Baitullah and Sadiq Noor. (Note: Sherpao dismissed the front-page report in the February 5 "Daily Times" predicting imminent military action against Baitullah, saying that the author's account appeared to be based more on speculation than on knowledge of the military's plans. End note.) The Ambassador described the bombing campaign as a major challenge for the government, recalling that neither Baitullah nor Sadiq Noor had abided by their commitments in South Waziristan in 2004. As declared enemies of the state, the Ambassador concluded, a determined action against both commanders and their organizations would send a strong signal to other militants in the region.

Radical Maulvis Deploy Madrassa Schoolgirls Against CDA

¶ 6. (S) Shifting the discussion to an ongoing conflict between Islamabad's Capital Development Authority (CDA) and the leadership of two radical mosques (Ref B), Minister Sherpao explained that TNSM leader Fakir Mohammad appears to have influenced the Islamabad maulvis to actively resist CDA efforts to dismantle unlawfully constructed establishments --

a campaign, the Minister admitted, which was designed in part to remove these radical mosques from sensitive sectors in the federal capital. In the hope of minimizing negative publicity, authorities are now bringing in reinforcements of Punjabi women police officers to remove a group of female madrassa students who have taken over a public library in protest of the CDA drive to close the mosques. Once the dust settles, Sherpao said, the religious communities will be offered new land far outside the city to reconstruct their mosques. Sherpao said that the militant maulvis are receiving support from Jamaat e-Islami leader Qazi Hussain Ahmed, but that Jamiat-i Ulema-i -- Fazlur (JUI-F) leader Fazl ur-Rehman has kept his distance. More worrisome, he continued, are indications that banned extremist Deobandi Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and possibly al Qaeda elements also have connections to the radical Islamabad mosques.

Next Steps on Extremist Entities

¶7. (S) The Ambassador raised press accounts reporting the 30 January arrest of several Lashkar e-Jhangvi militants in

ISLAMABAD 00000650 003 OF 003

Lahore (Ref C), seeking the Minister's analysis. Sherpao said the arrests were not/not related to the violence in Islamabad, Peshawar and the border areas, but then volunteered that authorities are increasingly suspicious of possible connections between JeM to the Taliban and other militants on the Frontier. The Minister confirmed the Ambassador's observation that the GOP's success in tightening controls on the Kashmiri militancy may have produced the undesired phenomenon of committed fighters redirecting their religious fervor to jihad in Afghanistan and the tribal areas. Sherpao told the Ambassador that he has requested that the Prime Minister convene an interagency meeting this month to review next steps for clamping down on domestic extremist entities and their alter egos (e.g., Lashkar-e-Tayyba/Jamaat ud-Dawa), as well as reviewing the GOP's options for tougher action on entities subject to UNSCR 1267 Committee sanctions.

Comment

¶8. (S) Many Pakistanis approached this year's holy month of Moharram with trepidation, fearing a wave of violence fueled by rising sectarian tensions throughout the Muslim world (Ref D). The English-language press has now come to the same conclusion as Minister Sherpao: this series of bombings, IEDs and missile attacks is not a manifestation of sectarian violence, but a carefully orchestrated campaign in retribution for the government's security operations against Taliban and militant strongholds in the border regions.

BODDE